

Introduction to Theatre

In an age of electronic media, why should teachers be concerned with the goal that every child in the state of Nebraska should be provided with a school curriculum in drama/theatre?

From the Greeks to today, theatre has been an important means for people to come together and celebrate, understand and appreciate life. Of all the arts, theatre most closely mirrors our daily lives, showing characters caught up in making crucial decisions and living with the consequences. As Jacques says in Shakespeare's "As You Like It":

All the World's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts . .

If "all the world's a stage," then the stage and our classroom are expansive places where we can explore all subjects with imagination and creativity through theatre.

Theatre provides learners a means of creative expression. They can develop skills, expand their imaginations and learn something about their world. They can "try on" different characters: a young person experiencing war, or leaving home, or confronting prejudice. Theatre provides an intensive learning experience that involves the body, mind, emotions and imagination.

Drama education prepares young people for life experiences, provides a foundation from which the talented artist can train for the profession, and creates a knowledgeable audience for the performing arts. Through theatre, learners explore their own creative solutions in math, science, business, literature, music, visual arts, dance, and in life. Because a theatre education enables learners to explore their creativity and emphasizes the imaginative side of education, the possibilities for those learners are endless.

Inquiry into Theatre

Theatre	PERCEIVING	INTERPRETING	EVALUATING	CONNECTING
TECHNICAL APPROACH	What basic components are needed to appreciate and participate in a theatre event? B4	How do components of theatre express meaning? B5	What level of proficiency was achieved in the theatre event? B6	How do the knowledge and skills used in theatre assist individuals in everyday life? B7
CREATIVE APPROACH	How might one gain a new understanding from a theatre event? B8	How might theatre help people express what they understand? B9	In what ways was the theatrical process effective? B10	What links can be made from this theatre experience to life? B11
CULTURAL/HISTORICAL APPROACH	From what perspective does one view a theatre event? B12	In what ways does this theatre event reflect its time and culture? B13	What makes this theatre experience important? B14	How does this event relate to other times, places and cultures? B15
CRITICAL APPROACH	What criteria will be used to describe this event? B16	What is this work trying to express? Does it achieve that? B17	Why does one choose "this" rather than "that"? B18	How do my criteria compare to those of others? B19
AESTHETIC APPROACH	What responses are evoked? B20	What does this mean to me? B21	Why is this good? B22	How does theatre change lives? B23

Definitions of *Learning Process* from the Theatre perspective

Perceiving: To understand what is sensed. We describe and analyze our thoughts and feelings about the theatre event.

Interpreting: To express what is understood. We ask how and what a theatre event communicates.

Evaluating: To determine the worth of what is understood/expressed. We reflect on the qualities we value in a theatre event or in art in general.

Connecting: To find a relationship between what is understood/expressed and life. We are searching for those characteristics in theatre that communicate and relate to an individual.

Definitions of *Approaches* from the Theatre perspective

Technical: The components plus basic skills and vocabulary of the theatrical work. Components include the script, actor, stage, audience and scenic elements.

Creative: The process through which the artist and/or audience uses the components and skills to create or reflect upon a theatre experience. This is an evolving process which requires experimentation with various components and techniques to create theatrical form and convey meaning.

Cultural/Historical: The way theatre relates to time, place and point of view. The meaning of a theatre event is derived from its specific time and place. We are interested in how the artist, the historical setting of the artist, and the cultural content shape the form and meaning of the theatre ever

Critical: The standards of measurement used to classify and judge. We examine how effectively basic components and skills are used creatively in a theatre event to evoke a response from an audience and to connect to our personal experiences.

Aesthetic: The way theatre experience allows response, feeling, imagination and action. This approach encourages individual emotional responses to theatre and links these responses to more philosophical views of the human condition.

THEATRE

Technical Approach

to Perceiving

What basic components are needed to appreciate and participate in a theatre event?

Questions:

- What are the parts of a play?
- How do the parts of a play contribute to telling a story?
- What are the elements of a theatrical production?
- What are the parts of a performance space?
- What skills are needed to portray a character?
- What skills are needed to create an environment?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of a technical vocabulary and basic information about the theatre.
- Recognize/demonstrate skills of performance and production.

Sample Activities:

Read a story or consider a historical moment; translate it into a script (e.g., Reader's theatre, radio play or drama) with emphasis on the dialogue. Perform it.

View a live or taped performance. Identify the components that made up the production (e.g., actors, sets, costumes, lights and audience).

Study dialects. Write a monologue using a specific dialect. Perform the monologue using the dialect.

Choose a historical character. After researching the life and times of the character, create a costume for that character.

Technical Approach to Interpreting

How do components of theatre express meaning?

Questions:

- How does a play express meaning?
- How is meaning conveyed by the actor? Through design elements? Through text?
- What are the minimal components needed to express meaning?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Demonstrate how verbal and nonverbal communication work together to present a character.
- Explain what scenery and lights bring to a theatrical performance.
- Identify and analyze the ideas in a play.
- Explain how a play's themes are transmitted through characters and plot.
- Explain how the architectural elements of the performance space contribute to the production's meaning.
- Identify various theatrical styles and how each expresses a different meaning.

Sample Activities:

Have each learner create a character of “a lion.” Discuss the different interpretations. How are they alike? How are they different? What feelings were expressed? How were they expressed? Create another character—e.g., a mouse, lion-tamer or gazelle—and express the same feelings. Discuss how they were the same.

Look at pictures or video excerpts from different productions of the same play. Compare how the design elements were used. Discuss how these images affected the learner's understanding of the play.

Read a play. Determine the style of the piece. Select another style. How would the play change if it were produced in that style?

THEATRE

Technical Approach

to Evaluating

What level of proficiency was achieved in the theatre event?

Questions:

- How well could I be seen and heard?
- How well did the scenery make the theatrical experience believable?
- Were the costumes or sets well built?
- How does my performance compare with others performing the same piece?

Performance Objectives

Learners will:

- Analyze the strengths of a production's story, acting and scenic elements.
- Identify and analyze strengths and weaknesses of their own work and the work of others.
- Identify levels of skills needed in production.

Sample Activities:

Divide the class into groups. Have each group perform the same short scene. Each group should collaborate to establish a place through scenery, props and sound. Compare and contrast the scenes.

Have each learner identify an acting skill and write that skill on a piece of paper. Put the papers in a container and have each pick one at random and demonstrate the skill. Lead a group discussion on level of skills demonstrated.

After viewing a theatrical production or watching one on videotape, have learners write a review in which they express their ideas and opinions about the production.

Have the class read two plays. Compare and contrast the endings for logic and consistency of character. Discuss with the class which ending is the more believable and why.

Have the class build a piece of scenery or a costume. Compare with professionally built scenery or costumes that you might borrow. Discuss the differences with the class.

Technical Approach to Connecting

How do the knowledge and skills used in theatre assist individuals in everyday life?

Questions:

- How do the elements of theatre relate to real life?
- How does the character in a play compare to a real person? To each learner?
- How might designing and building stage scenery help me develop an appreciation for the visual arts?
- How does acting a role help a person to acquire self-confidence, discipline, poise and an understanding of others?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Discuss how life has players, costumes, makeup and setting—just as a play has.
- Identify human traits they have viewed and analyzed in a character in a play.
- Demonstrate how designing a stage set teaches one about the principles of design.
- Discuss how the knowledge and skills acquired in theatre can be utilized in lifelong learning.

Sample Activities:

Compare a character from a play or a book with a real person. What personal qualities demonstrate leadership? compassion? honor?

Use performance techniques to prepare for a job interview

Describe how the elements of lighting and setting learned in theatre can be used in one's home?

THEATRE

Creative Approach

to Perceiving

How might one gain a new understanding from a theatre event?

Questions:

- How many ways can a character be created?
- How can different scenery and costume designs serve the same play?
- How many ways can the director create focus?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Experiment with various theatrical ways to convey an idea.
- Explore multiple ways to describe a situation.
- Explore how audience responses might differ.

Sample Activities:

Select a story, play or historical event. Challenge the class to use nontraditional materials to design costumes or prop possibilities for a character. Have learners explain their choices to the class.

Look at slides or pictures of several paintings noting how each artist achieved focus. Ask each learner to “block” a short scene using these ideas. Discuss what was learned from the paintings.

Decide on a situation. Begin an improvisation and have different audience members join.

Creative Approach to Interpreting

How might theatre help people express what they understand?

Questions:

- How are different meanings presented?
- How do symbols and metaphor convey meaning?
- How is subtext expressed?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Identify how verbal and nonverbal communication work to express intent.
- Identify how the themes of a play or production are revealed.
- Synthesize how the elements of a play evoke a personal response.

Sample Activities:

Pantomime an everyday activity. Add words to this activity and present it again. Explore the similarities and differences between these two presentations in expressing meaning.

Choose a character from a play. Transform the character into a different creature; e.g., a dog, a cat, a lion. Learners will support their choices through writing, speaking and debating.

Consider several plays read by the class. Discuss the themes and decide if they relate to each other. Demonstrate the correlations.

THEATRE

Creative Approach to *Evaluating*

In what ways was the theatrical process effective?

Questions:

- Does this piece have artistic merit?
- Do all of the technical aspects seem unified?
- Could the work be changed to make the artistic experience more effective?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Develop criteria for self and group evaluation.
- Demonstrate self-evaluation skills.
- Demonstrate group evaluation skills.
- Critique each learner's collaboration.

Sample Activities:

Improvise a scene. Discuss each person's contribution.

Have each learner keep a journal during a production. Learners record their thoughts on their personal choices, how conflicts were resolved and how the collaborative process worked.

Perform a scene. Critique the scene based on selected criteria. Revise and perform the scene.

Divide the class and assign each group to design a specific area (costumes, lights, sets, makeup) for a musical. Discuss how much collaboration must take place to have a unified production. Lead a class evaluation on the extent to which the collaborative process succeeded.

Learners will write a play together as a class project. Start by sharing ideas in a large group. Then have learners work on the play as individuals. After completion of the written play, learners will analyze the writing process first as a group activity and then as an individual activity.

Evaluate an improvisation to determine how well the characters used the different creative elements of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

Creative Approach to Connecting

What links can be made from this theatre experience to life?

Questions:

- Do I identify with any characters in this play?
- What themes in this play give me insight into my life?
- By performing, what do I learn that can be used in life?
- How does this reflect society?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Compare and contrast situations of characters with their own lives and the lives of their friends.
- Identify knowledge and skills gained from reading, viewing or performing.
- Explore various characters in a play. Incorporate life skills that help strengthen the portrayal of the character.

Sample Activities:

In a play or book that the learners have read, discuss what characters are most and least like them. Have learners write a letter to one of these characters asking questions about decisions the character has made. Then have the learners answer the letter as if they were the character.

Discuss the theme of a play assigned for class. Have learners translate the theme into a philosophy of their lives. Have them edit this philosophy to one sentence or phrase and make a poster that states this philosophy. Have them sign their name as creator of this work. Place the poster somewhere in the classroom. Be prepared to discuss the ideas with your class when asked to do so.

Ask the principal to come to your classroom for a performance by the learners. After the performance, explain to the principal what valuable skills have been gained from performance and evaluation and indicate why theatre is essential to the learners' education and lives.

THEATRE

Cultural/Historical Approach

to Perceiving

From what perspective does one view a theatre event?

Questions:

- What context would reveal this theatre event?
- What purpose does theatre serve in a culture?
- How do culture and tradition shape theatrical structure and style?
- How do audiences define a play's meaning?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Discuss theatre's beginnings and development.
- Recognize importance of audiences in determining meaning.
- Recognize relationships between theatre and cultures.

Sample Activities:

Imagine and perform the ways theatre possibly began.

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group the task of creating a ritual celebration based on class studies (e.g., birthday, revolution, Kwanzaa Day). Each group will share its ritual with the rest of the class. Have the class discuss the similarities and differences of each group's ritual.

Use Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare" to tell the story of Hamlet or Macbeth. Compare how the play was received by audiences of the 16th century and audiences of today.

Develop a visual time line to show major periods of theatre.

Acting companies often give voice to plays of social significance. Divide the class into two acting companies, and have each develop a philosophy and select plays to fulfill that philosophy. Have each company defend the plays it has selected based on its philosophy.

Cultural/Historical Approach to Interpreting

In what ways does this theatre event reflect its time and culture?

Questions:

- What historical and cultural elements make theatre significant?
- Describe what makes a “classic.”
- How has the experience of attending plays changed through time?
- How do different cultures use elements to express ideas/emotions?
- How has theatre reflected historical and social changes?
- How do different cultures use scenic elements to express their ideas and emotions?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Demonstrate how the theatre reflects culture.
- Recognize what makes a classic stand the test of time.
- Demonstrate how their present culture is reflected in theatre.

Sample Activities:

Following a production or reading, have learners rewrite an important scene using another culture or point of view.

Have class members create masks based on their culture. Compare with pictures of masks of other cultures. Discuss what the masks tell us about these cultures.

Identify a culture (real or fictitious) and have learners speculate what its theatre was/will be like. What would theatre be like in the “Star Trek” culture? How will television, film, video games, computers and virtual reality affect the future of theatre?

THEATRE

Cultural/Historical Approach

to Evaluating

What makes this theatre experience important?

Questions:

- What makes this play important today?
- Why was it important in its time?
- How would audiences respond to this play today?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Analyze a play from another time and culture.
- Explain why a play was enjoyed by its audience.
- Explain whether this theatrical experience is important in our time and culture.
- Discuss how the culture is affected by various social issues.

Sample Activities:

Have the learners read several fables from other cultures. Improvise these. Evaluate the importance of the fables to their culture and to ours.

Read the play "The Diary of Anne Frank." Discuss its value today as a document of human experience.

Prepare a questionnaire for the audience of your next production. Work with the class in deciding the questions to ask about whether the audience enjoyed the experience and if they thought it worthwhile. Have the class hand out, collect and tabulate the results. Lead a discussion on what the results mean.

Cultural/Historical Approach to Connecting

How does this event relate to other times, places and cultures?

Questions:

- What societal concerns have affected the making of theatre?
- How can a play serve as a record of its culture for future societies and what continued impact might it have?
- How does a play reflect the concerns of its own society?
- What universal concerns are addressed in plays?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Demonstrate ways in which plays confirm or challenge societal values.
- Identify societal conditions that might affect the making of theatre.
- Identify and trace universal themes in plays across different cultures and times.

Sample Activities:

Read three or four versions of the “Cinderella” or “Red Riding Hood” stories from other cultures; e.g., Japanese (“Lon Po Po”), Modern (“The Paper Bag Princess”), Brothers Grimm, Walt Disney. Discuss how each version reflects the culture when written.

Study the play “Romeo and Juliet.” What are the problems in reading and performing this play for modern audiences? View a modern film of the play. How does it solve these problems?

Following the study of a specific historical period, write a short script based on your research. Perform the script. How does this play relate to people today?

THEATRE

Critical Approach to *Perceiving*

What criteria will be used to describe this event?

Questions:

- What are my expectations? Were they met?
- Does this work hold my attention? Why or why not?
- Is this work significant and why?
- Why has this work been successful?
- Will it continue to be successful?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Develop and apply criteria to evaluate a performance.
- Constructively critique their own work including collaborative efforts.
- Exhibit appropriate vocabulary and communication skills in criticism.

Sample Activities:

Brainstorm criteria for a successful performance of a play (e.g., volume, diction, focus and presence).

After viewing a production, have learners write critical reviews as if they were reporters. Comment on the story, acting and scenery based on criteria that fit the local community.

Read a critical review of a play or movie the learners have seen. Have learners identify criteria used in the review. Have learners compare their criteria with those used by the reviewer.

Critical Approach to Interpreting

What is this work trying to express? Does it achieve that?

Questions:

- How do I react to this performance? Why?
- How well did the work communicate its story and meaning?
- Were the levels of meaning in this play clearly presented?
- Did I understand the performance? What helped and hindered my understanding of the performance?
- How does a person know that an audience is understanding what is being communicated?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

Analyze and articulate what they have gleaned from a theatre experience.

Describe how metaphor and symbolism help convey layers of meaning.

Sample Activities:

Divide the class into groups. Have each group act out a favorite story. Discuss with the class what worked, what didn't and why.

Discuss in a group each learner's favorite actor/actress. How does one's acting bring meaning to a character and a performance?

Analyze the designs for a certain production, and discuss how well the visual elements aided in an audience's understanding of the story.

THEATRE

Critical Approach to *Evaluating*

Why does one choose “this” rather than “that”?

Questions:

- What qualities do audiences value in a theatre event?
- How do the choices made affect the piece?
- How are the elements of theatre used together to create this production?
- How does knowledge of a particular style or movement help me to understand and appreciate this work more?
- Are these valid criteria for judging the work?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Develop criteria for judging theatre.
- Articulate how theatrical elements used well together help to create style.
- Describe several different styles of theatre, especially those that challenge conventional definitions. Apply their criteria to each of the styles.
- Determine whether or not the criteria are valid?

Sample Activities:

Divide the class into groups. Have each group perform the same scenario. Discuss how the choices made affect the completed work.

Design two different costumes for one character, and discuss the criteria used to evaluate each one.

Show the class videos of two musicals from two different time periods. Discuss the differences in style between the two. Identify elements that date a production.

Following a performance, have a discussion of what was felt to be the original intent or message. Could the director have made different choices?

Ask the class to develop criteria to judge theatre. Show the class videos of different styles of theatre. Have the learners apply their criteria. Evaluate criteria as to their validity.

Critical Approach to *Connecting*

How do my criteria compare to those of others?

Questions:

- How do standards learned in theatre relate to those learned in life situations?
- What cultural standards are used to evaluate a theatrical experience?
- How do my standards compare to standards of the past or the present?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Identify standards in theatre that relate to those in other fields of study.
- Identify how their criteria for evaluating a theatrical experience are drawn from other kinds of experiences in their lives; e.g., television, sports.
- Articulate how their criteria are drawn from the past.

Sample Activities:

Improvise a scene about a situation the group has seen or experienced in your school. Discuss how this situation is viewed by each participant.

Analyze how one's experiences influenced his/her reaction to a current popular movie.

Choose a play. Discuss the themes. If this were turned into a visual artwork, a dance, or a piece of music, what criteria would be used to judge the latter? Are the criteria the same as for judging a play?

Keep a journal on actors you have seen in plays, television and movies. How effective were the actors in creating believable people? What criteria were used to make the evaluation?

THEATRE

Aesthetic Approach

to Perceiving

What responses are evoked?

Questions:

- How does a performance engage the learners intellectually, physically and emotionally?
- How does theatre make me more aware of myself and my relationship to the world?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Describe and analyze how theatre stimulates an audience emotionally, intellectually and physically.
- Describe how theatre makes people more aware of others and of self.

Sample Activities:

After viewing a production, learners will communicate their reactions through another art form

Prepare a questionnaire concerning why people go to see live theatre or to movies. Distribute these questionnaires at a local event. Tabulate the answers and prepare a report that best describes the responses gathered.

Listen to the musical selection "Peter and the Wolf." What is the conflict inside the wolf? What motivates him? Improvise a dialogue among the learners stating all the issues with which wolves have to cope in today's society. Let the class become the community. What are learners' reactions to the wolf's character?

Aesthetic Approach to *Interpreting*

What does this mean to me?

Questions:

- How did I respond?
- How does the work help me look at myself in a new way?
- How does life affect theatre? How does theatre affect life?
- How does the collaboration between audience and performer affect the creation of meaning in the theatre?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Compare a live theatrical experience with viewing a film, listening to radio, or reading a book.
- Identify various levels of meaning in a theatrical work.
- Articulate the various ways theatre can lead to creative self expression and personal meaning.
- Articulate the importance of diversity in the making, interpretation and evaluation of theatre (e.g., gender, multicultural and nontraditional).

Sample Activities:

Have learners pick a special moment from their lives that involves self and others. Image a picture of this moment. Think about why learners chose that moment, how they felt, and how they thought the others might have felt. With partners, create a living picture of that moment. Share it with the class. Discuss what is happening in the picture. Describe how the characters are feeling. Explain why certain conclusions were reached.

View a video/film/production. Describe how it created meaning and form. Identify the various levels of meaning. Could this work help people deal with problems? Explain.

Choose an incident common to the participants. Divide into small groups to discuss what happened. Have each group re-enact what happened. Compare the presentations. What similarities were there? What differences? Why?

Choose an incident from the news. Re-enact the incident. Discuss how interpretation might be shaped by prejudice, ignorance or viewpoint.

THEATRE

Aesthetic Approach

to Evaluating

Why is this good?

Questions:

- Who says this is good?
- Was this a success?
- What does success mean: Financial? Personal? Societal impact? Test of time?
- What did I learn?
- How strong are my feelings?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Develop personal criteria for evaluating theatre.
- Develop a personal definition of aesthetic responses.
- Articulate the philosophy of a theatrical work.

Sample Activities:

View taped segments from various television programs. Decide on criteria for evaluation before ranking the programs.

Develop a chart to be placed on the wall of the classroom that represents evaluative points of view (e.g., financial, personal, social, critical and historical). During the year, as learners view theatrical presentations, have them make an appraisal of each performance from these points of view. Hold frequent discussions during the year. As the discussions and time progress, learners can reevaluate the performances.

Brainstorm a list of favorite television shows. Discuss. Why is a particular show popular? Do adults approve of this show? Is it important that other people like it?

In small groups, review various definitions of aesthetics from art and music. Have each group collaborate on a definition of aesthetics. Share and discuss.

Aesthetic Approach to Connecting

How does theatre change lives?

Questions:

- How does reading, radio, film, or stage production affect my personal emotions, ideas and opinions?
- How does theatre provide occasion for celebration and festival?
- How does theatre challenge one to social action?
- How does theatre affirm and challenge social mores?

Performance Objectives:

Learners will:

- Articulate how attending a performance provides them with a sense of an occasion, a place to celebrate.
- Express personal emotions, ideas and opinions through participating in a theatre activity.
- Explain how a play affirms or challenges their societal or personal values.
- Discuss how persuasion techniques learned in the theatre are used in the media and politics.

Sample Activities:

Plan for the entire class to attend a school play or movie together. Have the learners discuss the value of such a group activity instead of attending a play or movie alone.

Through the use of puppetry, re-enact a situation. Include multiple points of view or involve the audience in selecting how the characters resolve the issue.

Improvise a scene about a highly publicized school issue. Create a television script from this improvisation; produce it on videotape. Compare and contrast the actual event with the televised production. Discuss the televised production's merits and weaknesses.